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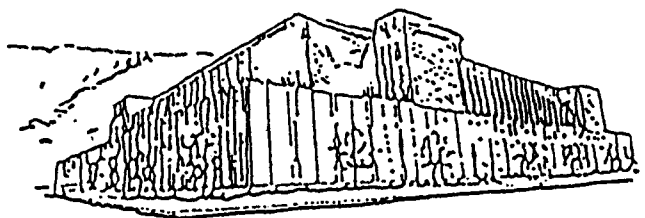
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INTERTEXTUALITY, DIALOGIC, AND CARNIVAL IN  
EL GENERAL EN SU LABERINTO

by

James H. Watson

B.A. Vanderbilt University, 1990

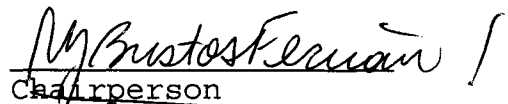
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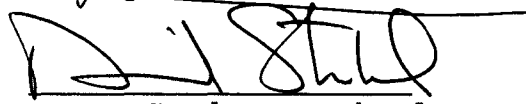
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1996

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Intertextuality, Dialogic, and Carnival in El general en su laberinto (59 pp.)

Director: María José Bustos Fernández

MJBTF.

Gabriel García Márquez's El general en su laberinto offers a study of the Bahtinian concepts of intertextuality, dialogic, and carnival. This historical novel takes place during the final months of the life of the Liberator, Simón Bolívar. The third person narrator follows the General from his disgraceful fall from power in Bogotá to his death near Santa Marta, jumping back and forth in time to recall important events in the Liberator's life. The novel's intertexts include oral traditions, previous works of García Márquez, Cervantes's Don Quixote, and historical texts and documents. Don Quixote provides a powerful thematic intertext as it both places the novel in the tradition of the dialogic discourse, and highlights the importance of Bolívar as a cultural signifier.

The traditional nineteenth century historical documents concerning Bolívar exemplify the monologic discourse that García Márquez challenges and subverts. Although García Márquez makes claim to historical accuracy in the novel's epilogue, he uses irony to move the novel beyond the monologic discourse of written history.

While the novel conforms to the monologic discourse by portraying the General as a hero, it contrast the carnivalized image of an sickly, defeated figure, thus creating the dialogic discourse. The General embodies the self-conscious, independent, unfinalizable hero of the dialogic discourse as he rebels against anyone's attempt to give a total representation of him.

The resulting dialogic novel both challenges Bolivarian history and myth, and presents a new, alternative myth.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1989, Gabriel García Márquez published El general en su laberinto, weaving history and fiction into an account of the final months of the life of Simón Bolívar, the Liberator. Early in the novel Bolívar, "the General," leaves Bogotá, Colombia, rejected by the countries he has liberated, for voluntary exile in Europe. The novel's third person narrative voice follows Bolívar down the Río Magdalena to the Atlantic Ocean, jumping back and forth in time in order to recall important episodes throughout his life. The Liberator's journey ends with his death near Santa Marta, Colombia.

In his article, "Gabriel García Márquez: Labyrinths of Love and History," Michael Palencia-Roth discusses the novel in relation to García Márquez's other works. Palencia-Roth argues that by writing a historical fiction based on the life of Simón Bolívar, García Márquez shows that his other fictional works are grounded in what the author perceives as the reality or "poetic truth" of Latin America.

George McMurray offers a brief but useful review of the novel in "García Márquez's El general en su laberinto: History and Fiction." By identifying in the novel the rhetorical devices commonly employed by García Márquez, McMurray places the work in perspective with relation to the novelist's other works, concluding: "The author understandably holds his protagonist in great esteem, but



. . he also identifies with Bolívar's pessimistic assessment of [Latin America's] future"(123).

In "The Purpose of Historical Reference in Gabriel García Marquez's El general en su laberinto," Helen Weldt-Basson reviews many of the historical sources that García Márquez credits in the novel's epilogue. Although García Márquez claims historical accuracy in his epilogue, Weld-Basson asserts that a study of one of the author's primary sources "reveals contradictions and alterations of history that . . . illustrate . . . ways in which García Márquez uses historical material for purely novelistic purposes"(Weldt-Basson 102). According to Weld-Basson, García Marquez's "intention upon blurring the borders of history and fiction is to question the validity or special status of historical texts"(107). However, at the same time, García Márquez provides a list of historical resources and a chronology in order to focus "on the contradictory task of clarifying the borders of history and fiction"(107). Weldt-Basson concludes that the author's "strange vacillation between two opposing goals suggests that although fiction can be historically educational it is ultimately still fiction and should be read as such"(108).

Isabel Alvarez Borland's article, "The Task of the Historian in El general en su laberinto" tackles the contradiction between the novel's challenge of official history's claim to truth, and the author's claim to

historical accuracy in the epilogue. According to Alvarez Borland, despite García Márquez's claim to "rigor histórico," the author gives preference "to oral history in the telling of Bolívar's tale" (441). Alvarez Borland cites the example of Manuela Sáenz's reading to the Liberator, and José Palacios's perfect memory despite his illiteracy, as examples of the importance of orality in the novel. Moreover, García Márquez constantly refers to legends and rumors as his sources for the depiction of the General:

In giving a voice to the common people, the fictional historian in El general en su laberinto is adopting a methodology for writing history which was relevant to historians of Bolívar's time (Alvarez Borland 442).

The result is "the assumption of the role of a historian by the author of the novel, as well as the juxtaposition of oral and written accounts" (Alvarez Borland 445).

In "'Los más insignes majaderos de este mundo'; Simón Bolívar Between Christ and Don Quixote in El general en su laberinto," Roy C. Boland explains how García Márquez's demythologization depicts Bolívar not as "God the Father," but as "'the man' or 'the son of man'" (157). Preceding his identification and analysis of the Quixotic and Christian elements in El general en su laberinto, Boland proposes that the novel points to "Bolívar's self-deprecating image of himself as a mock-heroic combination of Don Quixote and Christ" (158). Ultimately, García Márquez creates "a new literary myth out of the heroic failure of the Bolivarian

dream" (163) .

Seymour Menton's Latin America's New Historical Novel provides a survey of Latin American historical novels, dividing them into two groups: the new historical novel and the traditional historical novel. According to Menton, El general en su laberinto is a superb historical novel which falls into the latter category.<sup>1</sup> His chapter on this novel uses a comparison and contrast of four historical novels about Simón Bolívar to show why García Marquez's work is the best of the four.

## CHAPTER 1

### CENTRAL CONCEPTS OF BAKHTINIAN THEORY

El general en su laberinto offers a paradigmatic study of the Bakhtinian concepts of intertextuality, the dialogic discourse, and the carnivalization of literature. Julia Kristeva discusses intertextuality in relation to the theory of Bakhtin, stating that "Bakhtin considers writing as a reading of the anterior literary corpus and the text as an absorption of and a reply to another text"<sup>2</sup>. Thus, among the various levels of dialogical relationships in the novel, one may encounter the dialogue which occurs with other works of literature. By identifying and analyzing the intertexts in a given novel, one may reveal some aspects of its dialogue with those works. The easily identified intertexts of El general en su laberinto include the rumor and legend which the narrator refers to throughout the text<sup>3</sup>, the previous body of works by García Márquez, Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote, and the historical texts and documentation concerning the life of Simón Bolívar. García Márquez uses the novel to transform the monologic discourse of some prominent nineteenth century historical texts into what Mikhail Bakhtin would call a dialogic discourse.

Among the generic classifications identified by Bakhtin, one finds the distinction between works that adhere

to a monologic discourse, and those that present a dialogic discourse. Kristeva explains that, for Bakhtin, the epic and the historical discourse provide a model for monologic discourse in which "the narrator's absolute point of view . . . coincides with the wholeness of god or community" (77). In the case of Simón Bolívar, the monologic discourse can be seen in the dogmatic historical discourses of the nineteenth century, which García Márquez refers to as the "official memory"<sup>4</sup>. These historical texts idealize the Liberator, depicting him as a Saint, or a superhuman epic hero. David Bushnell and Germán Carrera Damas agree that "all too often Bolívar's life has been the object of a "cult" rather than a subject for rigorous historical analysis" (Bushnell xiv). My chapter, "The Traditional Historical Discourse," provides some examples of these narrow portrayals of Bolívar.

In a dialogic discourse, "Writing reads another writing, reads itself and constructs itself through a process of destructive genesis" (Kristeva 77). El general en su laberinto exemplifies the dialogic discourse as it takes in many different discourses--historical texts, other works of fiction, and oral legend--to construct a new myth surrounding the Liberator. At the same time, the novel maintains a level of self-reflection regarding the new myth which it creates.

Particularly relevant to my study is Bakhtin's discussion of different types of heroes in literature. He

describes the hero of the monologic discourse:

In a monologic design, the hero is closed and his semantic boundaries strictly defined: he acts, experiences, thinks, and is conscious within the limits of what he is, that is, within the limits of his image defined as reality; he cannot cease to be himself, that is, he cannot exceed the limits of his own character, typicality or temperament without violating the author's monologic design concerning him (Problems 52).

In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin characterizes the hero of the dialogic work as self-conscious, unfinalizable, free of the author's monologic designs<sup>5</sup>. In the dialogic work, the author's "entire artistic construction . . . is directed toward discovering and clarifying the hero's discourse" (54). The author assumes a dialogic position with regard to the hero, "one that affirms the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero. . . . The author speaks not about a character, but with him" (63).

In El general, the General embodies the qualities of the hero of the dialogic novel as he addresses the contradictions in representations--both in García Márquez's novel and in other historical discourses--of his character, asserting that the true source of all his actions is his dream of continental unity. García Márquez gives his protagonist the independence to defy any monologic design which seeks to objectify him. The hero of the dialogic work both rebels against the author's attempt to represent him, and constantly seeks to capture some fixed image of himself.

As the General voices his dream of continental unity throughout the novel, he clarifies his own discourse.

Bakhtin developed his theories regarding carnivalized literature as a result of his studies of the social phenomenon of "carnival." For Bakhtin, the rituals and festivities of carnival have "deep roots in the primordial order and the primordial thinking of man" (Problems 122). Carnival involves a "a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators" (122). In carnival all members of society participate, the actions and behaviors of all people deviate from the norm, and hierarchical structures and distances between people are suspended. "Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (123). Carnivalistic profanation incorporates an entire system of debasings and bringings down to earth, as well as parodies of sacred texts. The ritual of carnival culminates with "*the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*" (124). Bakhtin explains that the ritual of crowning/decrowning expresses "the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the joyful relativity of all structure and order" (124).

The carnivalization of literature can be traced back to the serio-comical genres of classical antiquity:

But the ancients themselves distinctly sensed its fundamental uniqueness and counterposed it to the serious genres--the epic, the tragedy, the history, classical rhetoric and the like (Problems 107).

Carnivalized literature provides a dialogic opposition to these monologic, "serious genres." As carnivalized literature, the serio-comical presents "a strong rhetorical element." However, "there is a weakening of its [the rhetorical element's] one-sided rhetorical seriousness, its rationality, its singular meaning, its dogmatism"(107). Carnivalization often involves "a cynical exposé" of legend, "one which relies instead on experience and free invention"(108). Other characteristics of carnivalesque literature include:

the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; . . .  
 . . . a representation of the unusual, abnormal  
 moral and psychic states of man, . . . unusual  
 dreams, passions bordering on madness. . . ."(108,  
 116).

In carnivalized literature a "destruction of the wholeness and finalized quality of a man is facilitated by the appearance. . . of a dialogic relationship to one's own self" (Problems 117).

García Márquez's novel is both a "cynical exposé" of some of the legend surrounding Bolívar, as well as a sort of parody of history. As the novel contrasts the heroic Bolívar with the image of a sickly and disillusioned character, one sees the contrast of high and low. García Márquez's novel focuses on unusual dreams, and depicts the



General's obsessions which sometimes border on madness.

Carnivalized literature also involves a mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king. This crowning/decrowning literally is seen in the General's fall from power. As the continent's greatest hero leaves Bogotá, an angry mob shoots "a general stuffed with sawdust" (13) in a symbolic execution of the Liberator. Later, someone flings cow manure at the General, shouting, "'Skinny Shanks'" (27)<sup>6</sup>, a harsh nickname which "was the name of a madman famous for his theatrical uniforms" (27). Symbolically, another crowning/decrowning occurs as the General shaves his head and dons a silk cap and a red hood (Boland refers to the silk cap and red hood as Bolívar's "crown of thorns" (163)).

Bakhtin explains how the treatment of the carnival hero differs from that of the epic hero using Socrates as an example:

The image of Socrates himself is of an ambivalent sort--a combination of beauty and ugliness. . . . Carnivalistic legends debase the hero and bring him down to earth, they make him familiar, bring him close, humanize him; ambivalent carnival laughter burns away all that is stilted and stiff, but in no way destroys the heroic core of the image (Problems 132-3).

One sees the beauty and the heroic core of Bolívar as the narrator reflects on his glory. At the same time, García Márquez's novel debases and humanizes the General in its depiction of dreams, sickness, bodily functions, sexual exploits, and madness.

In his thorough survey of autointertextuality in the works of Gabriel García Márquez, Edward Waters Hood defines *autointertextualidad*:

Preferimos emplear el término autointertextualidad para referirnos a esta clase de intertextualidad... la que se encuentra entre los textos de un mismo autor (47).

Following a brief review of the auto-intertextuality in the novel, I will discuss how Don Quixote functions as one of this novel's major intertexts. Next, I will give some examples of the dogmatic historical texts which have served to transform Simón Bolívar into a cult figure rather than a historical character. A discussion of the epilogue of El general en su laberinto will reveal how García Márquez seeks to create an authentic historical representation of Bolívar, and, at the same time, questions any attempt to achieve that goal. Last, I will focus on the text to reveal a dynamic between the monologic and dialogic discourses, and discuss the carnivalesque elements of the novel. I hope to show that the novel both demythologizes the figure of Bolívar of the authoritative monologic discourse of history and legend and creates a new myth. García Márquez's myth, the historical novel, enters a dialogic discourse with the other historical texts and novels that seek to depict the life of Bolívar.

## CHAPTER 2

INTERTEXTUALITY IN  
EL GENERAL EN SU LABERINTO

Many critics have pointed out the autointertextual elements of El general en su laberinto.<sup>7</sup> García Márquez himself compares the work to El coronel no tiene quien le escriba: "It is like El coronel no tiene quien le escriba all over again, but historically grounded this time" (qtd. in Palencia-Roth 56).<sup>8</sup> According to George McMurray,

Like the colonel in El coronel no tiene quien le escriba, he [the General] stands out as a tenacious, incorruptible fighter for justice, a kind of absurd hero who continues to struggle against adversity in the face of the most overwhelming odds" (120).

The General also resembles the Patriarch of El otoño del patriarca in his solitude (McMurray 120). Michael Palencia-Roth explains:

Like the Patriarch, Bolívar was a dictator . . . with the power to give absolute commands which were actually carried out. That power was first consolidated--and believed in by others--in 1814, when Bolívar ordered the mass execution of all the captured royalists in Guayra. . . . (56).

In his disillusionment and ambivalence towards war, the General resembles Colonel Aureliano Buendía of Cien años de soledad (McMurray 120, Palencia Roth 56). Edward Waters Hood puts El general en su laberinto in perspective as an autointertextual novel:

Tampoco es un accidente que el Libertador ficticio tenga rasgos de otros héroes fracasados de la ficción de García Márquez--el coronel a quien

nadie le esriba, el coronel Aureliano Buendía, el Patriarca y Florentino Ariza, por ejemplo (190).

García Márquez explains why he considers El general en su laberinto his most important work: "It demonstrates that my work as a whole is founded on a geographic and historical reality" (qtd. in Palencia Roth 56). Perhaps, García Márquez himself best clarifies his autointertextual work stating, "En el fondo yo no he escrito sino un solo libro, que es el mismo que da vueltas y vueltas, y sigue" (qtd. in Palencia-Roth 58). Michael Palencia-Roth adds that García Márquez seems to be saying, "Look, the story of Bolívar is of a piece with that of the Buendías, and both are the story of Latin America itself" (56).

#### Don Quixote as Intertext

The inclusion of the Quixote as an intertext in García Márquez's novel comes as no surprise. Simón Bolívar recognized himself as a Quixotic figure, once stating, "I am the world's third largest fool. The other two were Christ and Don Quixote" (Fuentes 252). In El general en su laberinto, the General meets a German who intends to capture and exhibit men who reportedly have the claws of roosters rather than feet. The general tells the German, "'Take me instead... I assure you you'll earn more money showing me in a cage as the biggest damn fool in history'" (95). Roy C. Boland points out that while the General calling himself

"the biggest damn fool in history" indirectly refers to the above quotation, the use of the cage refers to the closing scene of the Quixote, in which Don Quixote is hauled back to his village in a cage.

Boland identifies many other allusions to Don Quixote, such as the Sancho Panza-like figure represented by José Palacios, Bolívar's "faithful, practical, illiterate manservant" (Boland 158)<sup>9</sup>. These more obvious allusions serve as background for a more thematic study of the Quixote as intertext.

Don Quixote itself offers a unique study in intertextuality. Not only does it allude to and parody many of the important genres and works of its time, but it also introduces the concept of "a novel about a novel (the polemic of the author against the author of the projected second part)" (Discourse in the Novel 413). In Part II of Cervantes's novel, Don Quixote recognizes himself as a character of the novel created by Part I, making Part I the major intertext of Part II. Michel Foucault explains that once Don Quixote becomes conscious of himself as a literary character and a sign, he "must remain faithful to the book he has now become in reality" (119).

Like Don Quixote, Bolívar recognizes that his actions are governed by a mythological status greater than himself as an individual. He moves through history and García Márquez's novel with a consciousness of his own importance

as a cultural signifier. Both Don Quixote and the General exhibit the self-consciousness and unfinalizability which Bakhtin attributes to the hero of the dialogic novel.

Like Quixote, the General exhibits an insatiable appetite for books, as well as a tendency to identify with the characters he reads: "He read the Romantics . . . and he continued to devour them as if he were reading himself and his own idealistic, intense temperament"(93)<sup>10</sup>. At various points in the novel the narrator refers to some of the books read by or read to the General: A Reading of News and Gossip Circulating in Lima in the Year of Our Lord 1826 by Noé Calzadillas (7), Rousseau's Social Contract, and The Art of War by Raimundo Montecuccoli (31). At one point in his life the General "had left in Quito more than six hundred books, which he never attempted to recover"(31). Likewise, Bolívar's status as a cultural signifier affects both the writing and reading of the character depicted by García Márquez.

Bolívar's Quixotic dream is for all Latin America to unite as one nation. The goal of continental unity becomes a leitmotif as the General maintains dedication to this ideal in thought, speech, and action throughout García Márquez's novel, with statements such as: "Our enemies will have all the advantages until we unify the government of America"(97). Bakhtin explains that in the dialogic work the hero's

personal life becomes uniquely unselfish and principled, and lofty ideological thinking becomes passionate and intimately linked with personality (Problems 79).

Both Don Quixote and the General exemplify the ideologist whose "discourse about himself (merges) with his ideological discourse about the world"(79).

The "lofty ideological thinking" of these two heroes takes on a monologic quality which must be seen in the light of the dialogic work. As the hero of the dialogic work, the hero's ideological thinking does not coincide with the designs of the author. Instead, the hero's discourse exhibits an independence of the author's discourse or other characters' discourses. For example, the General's life-long obsession with his dream of continental unity is a monologic dream which must be seen in the context of the dialogic work. García Márquez makes no apparent effort to unify his designs as an author with the General's dream of continental unity. Rather, as I will show in this paper, the General seems to be part of a dialogic with the author in which the dream of continental unity plays a key role.

As Cervantes creates a novel in which Part I is a major intertext for Part II, García Márquez creates a historical novel in which the life of a historical figure is the major intertext for a work of fiction which represents that figure's last months of life. While Cervantes incorporated and satirized the existing literary corpus of his time (the books of chivalry, the pastoral romances, the picaresque

novel, and other genres), García Márquez absorbs and challenges the existing historical discourse concerning Bolívar, which often resembles the chivalric romance in its creation of epic heroes. Both authors present unfinalizable characters who both rebel against the limitations the author's representation, and seek to come to terms with some sort of image of themselves.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE TRADITIONAL HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

A look at some of the historical texts on Bolívar serves to demonstrate the monologic discourse concerning this historical figure in Latin America. While many scholars criticize the tendency to make a cult figure out of Bolívar, others justify this status with references to patriotic necessity or with even more exaggerated accounts of his greatness. In the first full-scale biography of the life of Bolívar in 1865, Felipe Larrazábel, (without irony, according to Bushnell<sup>11</sup>), writes:

In those times of obscurantism and oppression God took from the treasures of his goodness a soul that he endowed with intelligence, justice, strength, and gentleness. "Go," he said, "Carry light to the mansion of the night, go make just and happy those who ignore justice and do not know liberty" (123).

In another apparently sincere tribute to Bolívar in 1956, Father Alonso Zawadsky prays to Bolívar as if he were a saint:

Our father, Liberator Simón Bolívar, who art in the heaven of American democracy: we wish to invoke your name. America has sinned against your ideals.

Father Zawadsky finishes the prayer with, "Father and liberator: Hallowed and glorified be thy name" (128). These passages show how the historical figure is sanctified as an object of cult worship in parts of Latin America, particularly in Venezuela and Colombia. According to Germán

Carrera Damas, these types of texts evidence a sort of "literary romanticism transposed to historiography" (110). Charlotte Ekland describes the traditional discourse of Bolivarian history: "Los historiadores que quieren glorificar al Libertador utilizan las tradiciones mítico-literarios del siglo diecinueve para construir tramas con héroes y villanos" (129).

Germán Carrera Damas goes on to analyze the cultural function of what he calls the cult of Bolívar. He explains that, for Venezuelans, the mythologization of Bolívar has had the function of "dissembling a failure and delaying a disillusion" (111). In the midst of the current social and economic crises that confront Venezuela, "The life of Bolívar admirably condenses and exemplifies the whole process: from the blind and sincere initial conviction to the bitter and final disillusion" (112). Historian Cristóbal L. Mendoza answers Carrera by affirming the positive function of a romanticized historical interpretation of the life of Bolívar: "Happy are the nations whose cradle has had minstrels to make their glory and the deeds of their progenitors last forever!" (132). According to Mendoza, the Liberator's "fecund ideology [is] the sum and compendium of the aspirations of Hispanic America" (133).

García Márquez's portrait of Simón Bolívar emerges in the context of a long tradition of exaggerated portrayals of the Liberator as an epic hero. These views of Bolívar

resemble what Bakhtin calls the "specifically idealized, 'ennobled' discourse" of the chivalric romances, which "sets itself against the 'low,' 'vulgar' heteroglossia of all areas of life" (Discourse 384). Julia Kristeva, in her discussion of Bakhtin, explains how such representations function as monologic discourse:

The dialogue inherent in all discourse is smothered by a *prohibition*, a censorship, such that this discourse refuses to turn back upon itself, to enter in dialogue with itself (77).

In the case of historical depictions of Simón Bolívar, the prohibition or censorship is the pressure to conform to a tradition of inflated accounts of a monologic epic hero rather than attempt to create critical historical texts.

#### Gabriel García Márquez, el historiador

Early in Don Quixote, the narrative voice provides an ironic definition of the mission of the historian:

It is the business and duty of historians to be exact, truthful, and wholly free from passion. Neither interest nor fear, hatred nor love, should make them swerve from the path of truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, storehouse of deeds, witness for the past, example and counsel for the present, and warning for the future (68).

The narrator's sarcastic homage to the truth and his leitmotif, "true history," contrast with the fact that "Cervantes places so many obstacles between the reader and the truth . . . that it becomes impossible for us to know whether what we are reading is true or not" (Johnson 81).

In "Gratitudes," the epilogue of El general en su laberinto, García Márquez cites the tedious research demanded by this novel indicating that he has assumed the role of historian:

Nevertheless, beginning with the first chapter, I had to do occasional research concerning the way he lived, and that research referred me to other sources, and then to more and more until I was overwhelmed. I spent two long years sinking into the quicksand of voluminous, contradictory, and often uncertain documentation (272).

The author then lists historical sources he reviewed and incorporated into his novel. Although García Márquez claims to have had little experience in historical research, he emphasizes the care with which he attended to the historical details. Thus, he creates the illusion of having acted as a historian in the project. Isabel Alvarez Borland explains,

By assuming the role of the historian and, by letting the reader know how the book was constructed, García Márquez is in fact exploiting the very methodology he wishes to criticize (440).

Roy C. Boland points out that by giving historical credibility to his novel, García Márquez "prevents this alternative literary vision from being dismissed as a colourful, quirky personal account of Bolívar's life and death. . . ." (157).

At the end of the epilogue, García Márquez injects a touch of irony to his pretense of historical precision. He begins by crediting the scholars who helped him discover a "half a dozen mortal fallacies and suicidal anachronisms that would have cast doubts on the exactitudes of the

novel" (273). Although García Márquez goes to great lengths to ensure the historical accuracy of this novel, he still makes fun of this endeavor in the last line of his epilogue, stating:

Nevertheless, I am not very certain I should give thanks for these final pieces of assistance, for it seems to me that such absurdities might have added a few drops of involuntary--and perhaps desirable--humor to the horror of this book (274).

Weldt-Basson explains that García Márquez takes this humorous approach to historical representation in order to highlight "the irony of pretensions to capture pure historical reality in any narrative, whether it be fictional or historical" (104).

Both García Márquez and Cervantes mix irony with pretensions of historical precision in a literary work, suggesting that neither author believes in the possibility of a totalizing representation of history. While García Márquez employs the historical documents of the monologic discourse in order to develop his historical character, he also takes time to poke fun at the claims of objectivity implicit in the discipline of history. Thus, García Márquez's text simultaneously repudiates "its role in representation . . . but remains incapable of detaching itself from representation" (Kristeva 79). In incorporating the monologic discourse of written history, García Márquez creates a dialogic novel which turns back upon itself as it simultaneously portrays the Liberator and calls into

question any attempt to achieve a portrayal.

## CHAPTER 4

THE DIALOGIC DISCOURSE IN EL GENERAL  
EN SU LABERINTO

An analysis of the dialogic discourse in El general en su laberinto will demonstrate how García Márquez transforms Simón Bolívar into a dialogic hero. I hope to show that while García Márquez's novel is an homage to Bolívar, it also challenges depictions of Bolívar as an epic or monologic hero. According to Charlotte Ekland,

El discurso que resulta desafía la autoridad sagrada de la estructura mítica, que encierra la visión heroica de la historia. El general en su laberinto ofrece una nueva visión del pasado que ilumina la situación histórica (129).

García Márquez both questions and conforms to the traditional historical discourse, causing the novel to turn back upon itself. This demythologization creates a sympathetic character who serves as a metaphor for Latin American history and Latin America's current social and political crisis.

Throughout The General in his Labyrinth the dynamic between the monologic and dialogic discourses manifests itself in contrasting images, and ironic descriptions of the General. The first scene of the novel presents the Liberator, sickly and dejected, "floating naked with his eyes open in the purifying waters of his bath" (3); the same chapter ends with a passage which indicates his significance as a hero:

General Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios was leaving forever. He had wrested from Spanish domination an empire five times more vast than all of Europe, he had led twenty years of war to keep it free and united, and he had governed it with a firm hand (37).

By listing the General's full name and his greatest accomplishments, García Márquez employs an "ennobled" language in his description of Bolívar, the national hero, which contrasts with his depiction of the General as ill and decrepit. The text continues to juxtapose the hero with the human being from the beginning to the end of the novel. According to Seymour Menton, "The major theme of the novel is the contrast between the deteriorating condition of Bolívar the man and the glorious exploits of Bolívar the legendary hero"(102). Germán D. Carrillo contemplates the significance of the demythologization of Bolívar:

De la desmitificación del personaje histórico emerge la desnuda humanidad del Bolívar de ficción. Sin embargo, lejos de lo que temían beligerantes bolivarianos tradicionalistas, el personaje humanizado, bajado a la categoría de los mortales corrientes, . . . es sencillamente una figura patética en extremo que nos mueve hacia la compasión y la solidaridad como tal vez pocos personajes "históricos" lo hayan logrado (602).

The following analysis uses a Bakhtinian approach to show how García Márquez uses fiction to test the hero generated by the authoritative discourse of history, against reality.

The text uses irony and hyperbole as part of the dialogic which mediates myth and history. At the beginning of the journey from Bogotá to Santa Marta, the narrator



reflects on the Liberator's great reputation for travelling on horseback:

He often said that the motion of his horse helped him to think, and he would travel for days and nights on end, changing mounts several times so as not to ride them to death. He had the bowed legs of old cavalrymen and the gait of those who slept with their spurs on, and a callus as hard as a barber's leather strop had formed on his buttocks, earning him the honorable nickname of Iron Ass. Since the beginning of the wars for independence he had ridden eighteen thousand leagues: more than twice the distance around the world. No one had ever disproved the legend that he slept in the saddle (43).

This exaggerated and humorous account of Bolívar's exploits as an equestrian maintains a level of ambiguity surrounding the hero. The reader does not know whether the author wishes to poke fun at the legend regarding the Liberator's ability to travel or to exalt his enormous capacities. While the above passage appears to reflect an admiration for the hero, it also parodies the chivalric romance-like discourse which is seen in traditional historical texts. The ultimate line, "No one had ever disproved the legend that he slept in the saddle," most adequately reflects this ambivalence toward the relation between history and myth. While García Márquez demythologizes Bolívar by presenting him as human throughout the text, he supports the legend by incorporating the heroic discourse. This ambiguous sentence counters the heroic discourse, as the reader realizes that no legend can ever really be disproved.

García Márquez refers two more times to the

impossibility of disproving legend. The General sends an officer to "inquire after a French merchant whose last name was Lenoit" in an effort to disprove

insidious gossip regarding a reckless, illicit passion that had sprung up between him and Anita Lenoit . . . during a river campaign. It troubled him, although he could do nothing to disprove it (127).

Although the General is certain that this woman never existed, and that "the legend had no basis at all in reality" (127), the legend is already beyond the control of the individual. According to García Márquez's narrator, the General "was so sensitive to everything said about him, true or false, that he never recovered from any falsehood, and until the moment of his death he struggled to disprove them" (114). In his self-conscious sensitivity to everything said about him, the General fits Bakhtin's characterization of the hero who "eavesdrops on every word someone else says about him, he looks at himself, as it were, in all the mirrors of other people's consciousnesses . . ." (Problems 53).

García Márquez's narrator attributes much of the historical resources concerning Bolívar to the "at least ten thousand letters" which Bolívar wrote and dictated throughout his life. Ironically, the General requests that all his letters be destroyed because "they are written with a good deal of freedom and disorder" (225). This attitude contrasts with that of Santander "whose letters . . . were

perfect in form and content" because "he wrote them with the awareness that their ultimate destination was history" (225). At the end of this passage, the narrator refers to "the legend, which has never been disproved, that he [the General] would dictate several letters to several different secretaries at the same time" (225). Once again, García Márquez speaks of a legend which was never disproved, resulting in a radical ambiguity between history and myth.

At some points in the novel, García Márquez defies the heroic discourse head-on. When discussing various portraits and physical features of Bolívar, the narrator states:

He had a strain of African blood through a paternal great-great-grandfather, who had fathered a son by a slave woman, and it was so evident in his features that the aristocrats in Lima called him Sambo. But as his glory increased, the painters began to idealize him, until they established him in official memory with the Roman profile of his statues. . . But Espinosa's portrait resembled no one but him, wasted at the age of forty-five. . . . (181).

In the above passage, García Márquez's text not only clearly challenges the "official memory," but also challenges the established image of Bolívar as a white, *criollo* hero. This alternative to the idealized Bolívar provides a different type of hero for the marginalized mestizo and mulatto majority of the Caribbean. Thus, García Márquez's revision of the establishment's "official memory" is no less than an homage to the Liberator. In the words of German D. Carrillo:

He aquí la primera y suprema ironía del enfoque

novedoso: que sintamos simpatía por el ente de ficción . . . bajado a la categoría de los mortales corrientes, presentado como un mulato con estrategias de guerrillero . . . que nunca lograrían 160 años de ininterrumpida revisión y mitificación desde la cátedra (602).

García Márquez's subverts this "160 años de ininterrumpida revisión y mitificación" by creating a fiction more based in reality than the establishment's official history.

García Márquez takes on the monologic discourse of legend that portrays Bolívar as a womanizer by simultaneously disclaiming "Santanderist" lies concerning the General's love affairs, humanizing this legend with detailed accounts of intimate relationships, and portraying a character who often did compromise his duty for the sake of pursuing love affairs. While García Márquez adheres to the authoritative discourse by affirming the General's legendary sexual exploits, he also challenges that discourse by portraying complex situations. Seymour Menton explains that this results in the portrayal of Bolívar as a "sympathetic Don Juan" (106).

When an aid confronts the General, "Confess, General: how many were there?", the general finally replies "Many fewer than you think" (154). However, later that evening the General and José Palacios agree that there had been thirty-five women in the General's life, "Not counting the one-night birds, of course" (154). The General attributes his elusive reply earlier that night to the indiscretion of his aide, Daniel Florencio O'Leary: "O'Leary is a great man . .

. but he takes notes on everything. . . . And there's nothing more dangerous than a written memoir"(154).

The preceding passage employs irony at several levels. José Palacios's calculations simultaneously dispel and create a myth surrounding Bolívar. Although the number thirty-five is supposed to downplay the General's reputation as a womanizer, it also affirms that acclaim. At any rate, the tone of the novel indicates an ambivalence toward this reputation, as if perhaps the reputation of womanizer was somewhat well-earned. Last, before his death, Bolívar actually requested that O'Leary write his memoirs<sup>12</sup>. However, even more ironically, García Márquez probably invented the conversation between Bolívar and Palacios of later that evening. Of course, Bolívar might have taken care not to reveal all details of his life to a possibly indiscrete biographer such as O'Leary. However, he could not possibly have predicted that his amorous exploits would be documented not only in primary historical documents, but also in a historical fiction by Colombia's premier novelist.

Seymour Menton points out that each chapter of The General in his Labyrinth "includes at least one of Bolívar's amatory episodes--almost all of which are apocryphal--with a proper amount of variety and eroticism"(107). Each of these episodes gives a humanizing touch to a formerly objectified subject. However, García Márquez reveals contradictions in Bolívar's character at every turn. For example, García

Márquez portrays a profound relationship between Bolívar and his mistress Manuela Sáenz:

In addition to being the last woman with whom the General maintained a long-term liaison after the death of his wife, twenty-seven years earlier, she was also his confidante, the guardian of his archives, his most impassioned reader, and a member of his staff with the rank of colonel (24).

Despite this lasting relationship, at times the General "had invented pretexts for keeping her at a distance while he took his pleasure with ladies who were highborn and with others who were less so" (25). While during certain stages of his life the General "showed signs of not being able to live without her," he also "showed signs of the same agitation when her visit lasted longer than expected" (25). The narrator goes on to describe this dynamic which existed between the General and Manuela Sáenz for years.

At one point, the General receives news from Manuela that she plans to leave for Europe with her husband. The narrator reports that this letter found the General "in the alien bed of Francisca Zubiaga de Gamarra, a spirited woman of action married to a field marshal who would later be President of the Republic" (153). In reaction to Manuela's letter, "The General did not wait for the second lovemaking of the night to write an immediate reply.... 'Tell the truth and don't go anywhere.... My love for you is steadfast' " (153).

García Márquez both subverts the authoritative discourse which portrays Bolívar either as a womanizer or as

a saint, and conforms to that discourse by portraying a complex character who indeed has had relations with many women. Although the General reflects on various love affairs throughout the novel, "No one ever heard an indiscretion from him regarding a woman he had made love to. . . ." (216). While García Márquez's Bolívar exhibits the capacity for a steadfast love for Sáenz, he also is "consoled . . . with other, transitory loves that he found along the way" (152). However, one might assume that the General loses his one true love when he loses his wife at the age of twenty. According to the text, "He never spoke of his dead wife again. . . . He had buried her at the bottom of a watertight oblivion as a means of living without her" (253).

At times, García Márquez depicts the General as stubborn and excessively proud to the point of absurdity. As the General persists in an all-night card game with one of his aids, Colonel Belford Hinton Wilson, the narrator describes a night in Bucaramanga in which "they had begun to play at nine o'clock and did not finish until eleven the next morning, when his companions agreed to let the General win three games in a row" (65). As Wilson continued to defeat the General in game after game, "the General became tense, his lips hardened and turned pale, and the eyes set deep under bushy eyebrows burned with the savage brilliance of other times" (64). The General refuses to allow anyone to

leave the card game, and even checks the cards to see if they are marked. Finally, Colonel Wilson receives a firm order from a superior officer during a break in the game to begin losing. However, Wilson allows Bolívar to win in such an obvious manner that the narrator explains, "The General understood" (65).

In contrast with this portrait of a defeated man, the General still shows moments of brilliance and glory during the journey to Santa Marta. Upon beginning the journey by barge down the Río Magdalena, the General takes control of the ship, saving it from impending disaster:

"Not that way!" he shouted. "To the right, the right, damn it!" The oarsman responded to the shattered voice still full of an irresistible authority, and without realizing it he took over command until the crisis had passed. . . . Captain Santos moved to one side, conscious once again of having confused port and starboard" (88).

Even more heroically, later that night the General allows the Captain to save face by recounting various tales of "memorious naval disasters", exclaiming, "What I'm trying to do is to make Captain Santos understand somehow my impertinence this afternoon" (89). Seymour Menton explains that this episode "enhances Bolívar's image as a mythical hero" (114). The contrast between the General's humiliation in the card game and his grace under pressure in saving the barge exemplifies the dialogic discourse which juxtaposes the defeated human with the mythical hero.

During the final journey to his death, the General



decides to rescue a stray dog who "defended himself with suicidal ferocity and refused to surrender" (95) when attacked by the General's two dogs. The narrator states, "They had bathed him and perfumed him with baby powder, but they could not rid him of his dissolute appearance or the stench of mange" (10). The General orders that the dog be named Bolívar, symbolizing (in dialogic discourse) the coarse reality of life, in contrast to the idealized epic hero Bolívar represents.

Seymour Menton points out that García Márquez treats dialogically the pro-Bolívar coup led by Rafael Urdaneta on September 5, 1830. The narrator reports:

It was the first coup d'état in the Republic of Colombia, and the first of the forty-nine civil wars we would suffer in what remained of the century (198).

According to Menton, "By using the first person plural for the only time in the novel, the narrator unequivocally condemns the coup" (105). If the narrator does not "unequivocally condemn" this last effort at achieving the dream of continental unity, he at least questions it.

The switch from the objective, third person narrator who narrates the entire novel, to the first person plural narrative voice, contributes to the dialogic in other ways.

Roy C. Boland explains:

García Márquez turns the novel into the collective alternative vision of Bolívar recounted by "nosotros", that is, the Colombian people. By means of this single, subtle and brilliantly executed variation of the narrative voice, García

Márquez has converted himself into the spokesman of all of "us", all of Colombia (157).

By asserting his solidarity with the Colombian people or *el pueblo*, García Márquez enriches the dialogic treatment of the historical discourse surrounding Bolívar. While the author has been criticized for demythologizing, parodying, or carnivalizing Bolívar, this change in narrative voice affirms his identity as Colombian. By offering this condemnation of the coup d'état and affirming his Colombian identity, the author maintains a distance between himself and the hero, Bolívar, without alienating himself from his readers. In Bakhtin's words, "If the umbilical cord uniting the hero to his creator is not cut, then what we have is not a work of art but a personal document" (*Problems* 51).

One of the leitmotifs of the novel is the General's obsession with his former friend and ally General Francisco de Paula Santander. George McMurray writes: "If the novel has a villain, it is General Francisco de Paula Santander" (120). According to Seymour Menton, "Some Colombian historians and patriots have criticized the novel . . . for portraying . . . Santander in a negative light" (96). However, García Márquez also treats dialogically Bolívar's enmity with Santander.

For example, the text labels Santander "the second man in the movement for independence," stating that Bolívar

distinguished Santander with the title The Man of Law. Nevertheless, the person who had merited all this had been living in exile in Paris for the

past two years because of his unproved complicity in a plot to assassinate the General(53).

The narrator goes on to describe in detail the events of the assassination attempt. The novel continues to focus on the General's obsession with Santander's betrayal. However, it is important to note the novel's clarification that Santander's complicity was never proven. In fact, the General commutes Santander's death sentence, while "Admiral José Prudencio Padilla . . . was shot on insufficient evidence"(56).

The text also takes on the lies perpetrated by the "Santander press" which "missed no opportunity to attribute military defeats to his (Bolívar's) nocturnal excesses"(113). According to the narrator,

Even before the final victory it was said that at least three battles in the wars for independence had been lost only because he was not where he was supposed to be but in some woman's bed instead (113).

The novel balances out the allegations that the Santanderist press invented lies in order "to diminish his glory," explaining that it was Bolívar himself who had ordered Santander to print lies to deceive the enemy during the War of Independence. Santander tell the General, "'We had a good teacher, Excellency'"(114).

Also, the text goes on to describe instances in which the General actually had "gambled his glory for the sake of a woman"(114). In this passage, he ignores rumors of a Santanderist conspiracy and spends ten nights with Josefa

Sagrario, a highborn Mompoxina. When the General finds out that Josefa Sagrario and her family are living in exile in Italy, he exclaims, "More of Santander's shit, of course"(115). However, a priest tells him, "No, General. . . . You exiled them yourself without realizing it..."(115).

On another occasion, the General spends three days with Delfina Guardiola, "the belle of Angostura." The narrator explains that "he almost lost a battle as well as his life while he was persuading Delfina to trust in his heart"(217).

The General's obsession with Santander takes on a certain level of absurdity in his rage toward Santander, his dreams about Santander, and even Manuela Sáenz's parrots which rant against Santander in three languages (See the following chapter on the carnivalesque). However, the General gets the last word as he explains the root of his problems with his former friend and comrade. Followinh against the idea of integrity because it was unfavorable to the local privileges of the great families"(202).

Ultimately, in El general en su laberinto, the Liberator's discourse about himself has to do with the Quixotic dream of Latin American unification. Bakhtin explains that in the dialogic discourse, the hero

is not an objectified image but an autonomous discourse, pure voice; we do not see him, we hear him; everything that we see and know apart from his discourse is nonessential and swallowed up by discourse as its raw material, or else remains outside it as something that stimulates and provokes. . . . The author does indeed leave the final word to his hero (Problems 53).

Despite all of the contradictions and ironies in this narrative surrounding the legend and history of Bolívar, the narrator always leaves the General the final word. In the following passage, the hero's discourse about himself takes on the appearance of a dialogue in which "the author speaks not about a character, but with him" (Problems 63):

"I know I'm ridiculed because in the same letter, on the same day, and to the same person I say first one thing and then the opposite, because I approved the plan for monarchy, or I didn't approve it, or somewhere I agreed with both positions at the same time." He was accused of being capricious in the way he judged men and manipulating history, he was accused of fighting Fernando VII and embracing Morillo, of waging war to the death against Spain and promoting her spirit, of depending on Haiti in order to win the war and then considering Haiti a foreign country in order to exclude her from the Congress of Panamá, of having been a Mason and reading Voltaire at Mass but of being the paladin of the Church, of courting the English while wooing a French princess, of being frivolous, hypocritical, and even disloyal because he flattered his friends in their presence and denigrated them behind their backs. "Well, all of that is true, but circumstantial," he said, "because everything I've done has been for the sole purpose of making this continent into a single, independent country, and as far as that's concerned I've never contradicted myself or had a single doubt." And he concluded in pure Caribbean: "All the rest is bullshit!" (203)<sup>13</sup>.

This long quotation serves to show how the author's discourse about the General is a discourse about "someone actually present, someone who hears him (the author) and is capable of answering him" (Problems 63). Through the General's statements regarding his dream of continental unity, "We see the hero in the idea and through the idea,

*and we see the idea in him and through him" (87) .*

CHAPTER 5  
THE CARNIVALESQUE

*El pueblo había llegado a tales extremos de inactividad, que cuando Gabriel ganó el concurso y se fue a París con dos mudas de ropa, un par de zapatos y las obras completas de Rabelais, tuvo que hacer señas al maquinista para que el tren se detuviera a recogerlo (Cien años de soledad 341).*

El general en su laberinto employs many of the same elements of the carnivalesque that one may identify in Don Quixote<sup>14</sup> and much of García Márquez's previous body of works. These elements include "humorous exaggerations, and... emphasis on bodily functions, from sex to elimination" (Menton 24)<sup>15</sup>, as well as more "pathological states of the soul, such as madness, split personalities, day dreams, dreams, and death" (Kristeva 83). According to Kristeva,

Out of the dialogue that is established between them (sex and death), the structural dyads of carnival appear: high and low, birth and agony, food and excrement, praise and curses, laughter and tears (78-9).

Seymour Menton points out that Bakhtin developed his notion of the carnivalesque in his studies on Rabelais. However, "the credit for popularizing Rabelais belongs to García Márquez, who in Cien años de soledad (1967) . . . graphically describes scenes of exaggerated eating and sexual prowess" (24). Carnavalesque elements such as hyperbole, bodily functions, bodily decay, identity issues, dreams, and sexual prowess serve to enhance the dialogic in

El general en su laberinto, which "challenges God, authority, and social law" (Kristeva 79).

One of the most noted hyperbolic passages of El general en su laberinto occurs as the narrator reflects on one of Manuela Sáenz's journeys in which she follows the General to Bogotá

in a caravan worthy of Gypsies, with her trunks on the backs of a dozen mules, her immortal slavewomen, and eleven cats, six dogs, three monkeys educated in the art of palace obscenities, a bear trained to thread needles, and nine cages of parrots and macaws that railed against Santander in three languages (153).

George C. McMurray points out that García Márquez's use of hyperbole in El general en su laberinto "not only provides comic, fanciful effect, but also highlights the fictitious nature of the work" (123). According to Edward Waters Hood, "the three monkeys educated in the art of palace obscenities" refers to masturbation, a taboo subject in the Latin American novel. Hood explains: "El tratamiento humorístico (del tema de la masturbación) demuestra que el autor no lo ha presentado con seriedad" (174). Throughout the novel the narrator describes the General's obsession with the betrayal of his former friend Santander. The "nine cages of parrots and macaws that railed against Santander in three languages" provides a dialogical treatment of the issue of Santander by introducing humor to the portrayal of this villain against whom the General so often rails.

As the General's barge approaches the town of Mompox, a



black officer on a warship aims a cannon at them, demanding passports. The General replies, "Although you may not believe it, Captain, I have no passport," highlighting the irony that the former President of the Republic and hero of the wars of independence carries no passport. When the officer realizes who the General is, "he leaped into the water with his weapons and ran down the riverbank to inform everyone of the good news" (103). The officer's exaggerated reaction to the General's arrival actually supports the heroic discourse, as it also contrasts with the disgrace with which the General leaves the country without even a passport. This humorous passage provides what Bakhtin would call a *serio-comical* treatment of the General's departure from power. The General's fall from power without even a passport in order to exile himself to Europe resembles "*the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*" (Problems 124).

The narrator of the novel describes the bodily functions and decaying body of the General in the spirit of Cervantes, but in a manner much less outlandish, and with more pathos. The General takes laxative pills for "chronic constipation" (9). Later, the same evening, "His body burned in a bonfire of fever, and he was farting stony, foul-smelling gas" (10). Eventually, the General rejects all medicines, except "the purgative pills he took . . . for his persistent constipation, and a senna enema for the most

critical bouts of sluggishness"(47). After the General eats an entire gourd of guavas, "almost not taking the time to breathe," he becomes very ill and "stayed in the hammock, prostrate with torturous pains and fragrant farts, feeling his soul slip away in abrasive waters"(110, 111). One of the General's three doctors who see him in his last days, Dr. Hércules Gastelbondo, gives the General candies rather than prescribing him medicine. When the General complains that these candies do not help him to gain back weight, the doctor replies, "Everything that enters the mouth adds weight, and everything that leaves it is debased"(216). As the General's life approaches its end, "a thick substance that gave him no peace began to ooze from his left tear duct"(234). At last, autopsies led physicians to believe that the General ultimately died from "a urinary disorder in which micturition was at first involuntary, then painful, and at last bloody, until the bladder was left dry and adhered to the pelvis"(260).

These examples of García Márquez's emphasis on bodily functions give way to a look at the leitmotif of bodily decay. Throughout the novel, the narrator refers, perhaps hyperbolically, to Bolívar's shrinking body. Several months before the journey to Santa Marta, "the General discovered that he was losing height as well as weight"(4). As the General departs Bogotá, the Interim President gives him "an enormous embrace that allowed everyone to see how small the

General's body was" (36). Once, a young girl visits the General in order to offer herself to him. In order to prove to her his illness, he shows her his decrepit body:

the meager belly, the ribs pushing through the skin, the legs and arms reduced to mere bone, all of it enclosed in a hairless hide as pale as death except for the face, which was so weathered by exposure that it seemed to belong to another man(182).

After the General suffers a fainting spell while descending a flight of stairs, the narrator reports: "He did not roll all the way down only because his body was so light" (233). On the last leg of the journey by sea into Santa Marta, "Montilla and Wilson had to hold him, for he was so light that a sudden wave could have swept him overboard" (245). At the time of his death, "The General had grown so small that the cuffs of his shirt-sleeves had to be turned up again and an inch was cut off the corduroy trousers" (257).

Perhaps the most tragic description of the General's body occurs upon the visit of General Mariano Montilla and the three Juans of the Bolivarist party. The narrator reports that the three Juans "were horrified at the sight of the body in torment that tried to sit up in the hammock and lacked the breath to embrace them all" (138). According to the narrator,

His bones were visible under his skin, and he could not focus his eyes. He must have been aware of the hot stench of his breath, for he was careful to speak from a distance and almost in profile. But what struck them was the evidence that he had lost height. . . . His official height was one meter sixty-five centimeters, . . .

and on the autopsy table he would measure four centimeters less than that figure. His feet were as small as his hands in relation to his body, and they too seemed smaller. José Palacios had noted that he wore his trousers almost around his chest and had to turn back his shirt cuffs (138).

General Montilla injects a dose of humor to the tragic situation, stating, "The important thing . . . is that Your Excellency doesn't shrink on the inside"(139).

Another humorous description of the Liberator's decaying body describes his vision impairment which could be traced by examining "several pairs of old spectacles." The narrator reports that these spectacles "increased in strength from the time the General discovered his incipient farsightedness . . . until the moment his arm was not long enough for him to read"(209).

The focus on Bolívar's body effects an atmosphere of carnival which contrasts the base realities of his existence, sickness, physical frailty, and bodily odors, with both the heroic discourse of History and the heroic character of the novel. In the words of Bakhtin, "Carnivalistic legends debase the hero and bring him down to earth, . . . humanize him; . . . but in no way destroy the heroic core of the image"(Problems 133).

This aspect of the novel contributes to another more profound element of carnival which has to do with identity or self-consciousness. Kristeva explains:

According to Bakhtin, these elements (the elements of carnival) . . . destroy man's epic and tragic unity as well as his belief in identity and

causality; they indicate that he has lost his totality and no longer coincides with himself (83).

The General's own struggle with identity plays a part in García Márquez's carnivalization of history.

Throughout The General in his Labyrinth Bolívar continues to make "'inconsequent' statements" (Kristeva 79) that reflect this loss of identity which Bakhtin and Kristeva identify as carnivalesque. Upon realizing that the people encountered during the journey to Santa Marta no longer recognize "the best-known man in the new republics," the General comments, "'I am no longer myself'" (44). When Colonel Wilson tells the General, "'I'm at the mercy of a destiny that isn't mine,'" the General replies, "'That's what I should be saying'" (67). At the suggestion of beginning again the fight for continental unity, the General exclaims, "'Not me. . . . All that's left for me is for them to throw me out with the garbage'" (118). When the wake of a naval ship called *The Liberator* endangers the General's barge and capsizes the entourage's barge loaded with provisions, the General ". . . like someone turning the page, . . . said to himself: 'To think I'm that man!'" (126). Bolívar writes to a friend, "'If you saw me you wouldn't recognize me'" (187).

In each episode and each statement, the General reveals himself as subject and object, as signified and signifier, as he questions his own identity and destiny. In El general

en su laberinto, Bolívar as a "carnival participant is both actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, . . . and splits into a subject of the spectacle and object of the game" (Kristeva 78). As discussed earlier in the section on Don Quixote, García Márquez portrays a Bolívar who is and sees himself as a cultural and historical signifier.

However, as García Márquez gives his character the perspective to see himself as an individual and as a historical figure, this character loses his sense of identity. As a character of carnivalized literature:

the possibilities of another person and another life are revealed to him, he loses his finalized quality and ceases to mean only one thing; he ceases to coincide with himself (Problems 117).

Ultimately, the General is resigned to the fate of all human beings, as the narrator states, "He could not master his soul" (134).

According to Bakhtin, "dreams, daydreams, insanity destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of a person and his fate" (Problems 116). Throughout the novel, various episodes recall Bolívar's dreams and troubled sleep. Early in the novel, the narrator describes what Bolívar claims to have been his earliest memory:

He dreamed that a black mule with gold teeth had come inside and gone through the house from the principle reception room to the pantries, eating without haste everything in its path while the family and slaves were taking their siestas. . . . The only thing left intact was the oval of his mother's dressing table mirror, floating in its own space (23).

The General also suffers from recurring dreams about Santander, his arch-enemy:

He said he dreamed about Santander's holding an open book on his round belly, but instead of reading he tore out the pages and ate them one by one. . . . He dreamed he saw him covered with cockroaches. . . . He woke up screaming because he dreamed that while they were having lunch together General Santander plucked out his own eyeballs because they interfered with his eating and placed them on the table (56).

José Palacios knows the General is sleeping when he hears him "speaking with the good diction and sharp timbre of his youth, which by then he regained only in sleep"(108). During his slumber, the General speaks of "bitter laments, remnants of a ruined glory that the wind of death was carrying away in tatters"(109). During the General's visit to Turbaco, he refuses to stay in the room where he slept on a previous visit because of a recurring dream of "a woman with illuminated hair who tied a red ribbon around his neck until she woke him"(135)<sup>16</sup>. As the General approaches death, he cries in his sleep: "When José Palacios heard the quiet sobs he thought they came from the stray dog picked up on the river"(228). Later, a dream in which the General sees "a very clean city, with white houses that were all the same"(241), the General identifies the dream as a portent, and decides not to go to Jamaica. Dreams serve as "a representation of the unusual, abnormal moral and psychic states of man" that indicate his "unfinalizability . . . and noncoincidence with himself"(Problems 117).

Along with the accounts of amorous exploits which I describe in the previous chapter on the dialogic in the novel García Márquez includes some tales of sexual prowess which approach Cien años de soledad in its use of humor and hyperbole. As I explain earlier, García Márquez cites Santanderist lies that seek to diminish the General's glory by exaggerating his love affairs. Ironically, García Márquez goes on to provide instances in which the General did jeopardize his duty as a leader for the sake of his love affairs. On a more humorous note, the narrator describes the General's escapades in Guayaquil where he

consoled himself in a multiple idyll with five indistinguishable women of the Garaycoa matriarchy, never knowing for certain if he had chosen the grandmother of fifty-six, the daughter of thirty-eight, or the three granddaughters in the flower of their youth (151).

The following year, Manuela finds the General in Perú

in the pleasure palace of La Magdalena. . . . The Presidential Palace was so disorderly that a Colonel of the lancers had moved out one midnight because the agonies of love in the bedrooms did not let him sleep (151).

In these passages, García Márquez employs a hyperbole which approaches the Rabelaisian excesses described in Cien años de soledad.

Hyperbole, bodily functions, bodily decay, loss of self, dreams and accounts of sexual prowess all serve to enhance the dialogic in El general en su laberinto by carnivalizing the traditional monologic historical discourse. Roy C. Boland writes: "García Márquez



'carnivalizes' or ironically subverts the image of the divine, heroic colossus glorified by poets. . . . "(157). These elements of the novel bring Bolívar, the Liberator, down into the realm of everyday life and humanize him, without destroying his heroic qualities. García Márquez converts Bolívar, the hero, into a rejected, disillusioned, and mentally disturbed character, whose obsession with the dream of continental unity dominates his existence. Carnivalization highlights the disparity between the heroic discourse and the discourse of everyday life.

## CONCLUSION

With the publication of The General in his Labyrinth, Gabriel García Márquez enters the Latin American historical discourse with a fiction based on the last months of the life of Simón Bolívar. Included in the novel's intertexts are oral tradition, previous works of García Márquez, Cervantes's Don Quixote, and historical texts and documents. The identification of Don Quixote as an intertext highlights the importance of the figure of Bolívar as a cultural signifier, and places the novel in the tradition of dialogic discourse. The traditional nineteenth century historical documents concerning Bolívar exemplify the monologic discourse that García Márquez challenges and subverts. While García Márquez claims some measure of historical accuracy, his use of irony moves the novel beyond the monologic discourse of written history. García Márquez simultaneously conforms to the monologic discourse by representing the general as a hero, and contrasts the carnivalized image of an ailing, defeated individual, thus creating the dialogic discourse. García Márquez's Bolívar exemplifies the self-conscious, independent, unfinalizable hero of the dialogic discourse. The dialogic discourse in El general en su laberinto resists the tendency to give a totalizing representation of the historical figure of Simón Bolívar. The result is a dialogic novel in which García

Márquez challenges the mythologized Bolívar of history, and presents an alternative myth.

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## Notes

1. This categorization has no relevance to my thesis. However, Menton goes on to state, "Metafiction and the Bakhtinian concepts of the dialogic, the carnivalesque, parody, and heteroglossia are for the most part missing" (95). Menton proceeds to discuss what he perceives as the limited examples of these elements in García Márquez's novel. I will assert that the dialogic discourse and carnivalization provide the driving force for The General in his Labyrinth.

2. Kristeva's classic essay on Bakhtinian literary theory, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, both provides an excellent explanation of the concept of the dialogic discourse, and expands Bakhtin's theories to include intertextuality.

3. For an analysis of the role of oral tradition in El general en su laberinto, see Isabel Alvarez Borland's article "The Task of the Historian in El general en su laberinto."

4. For a good collection of nineteenth century historical essays on Simón Bolívar, see David Bushnell's The Liberator, Simón Bolívar.

5. In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin explains how Dostoevsky's works exemplify the polyphonic novel which is characterized by dialogical relationships and carnivalization. Bakhtin cites the works of Tolstoy as a modern example of the monologic discourse.

6. "Skinny shanks" is translated from the original Spanish, in which the General is nicknamed "Longanizo" (El general en su laberinto 34).

7. For a complete study of autointertextuality in the works of García Márquez, see La ficción de Gabriel García Márquez: Repetición y intertextualidad. Edward Waters Hood offers a detailed analysis of the elements which make up García Márquez's fictional world which has its "realidad propia que es autorreferencial" (189). Hood concludes: "La obra total de García Márquez se puede enfocar como un solo texto: su autotexto" (199).

8. Palencia-Roth cites an interview with García Márquez conducted by Elvira Samper, Semana (Colombia), 20 March 1989, p. 28. This source was unavailable to me.

9. Boland analyzes the Quixotic and Christian elements in García Márquez's portrayal of Simón Bolívar. His article provides an excellent list of similarities between Don Quixote and Simón Bolívar. However, the majority of his essay focuses on the depiction of the Liberator as a Christ figure. Boland describes

how García Márquez transforms Bolívar into an "all-too-mortal Christ figure who, his quixotic dream punctured, like Alonso Quijano resigns himself to the irreversible finality of death"(159).

10. Bakhtin cites Don Quixote and Madame Bovary as examples of "the critique and trial of literary discourse around the hero--a 'literary man,' who looks at life through the eyes of literature and who tries to live 'according to literature.'" According to Bakhtin, "the 'literary man' and the testing of that literary discourse connected with him can be found in almost every major novel" (Discourse in the Novel 413).

11. Bushnell's collection of historical essays and documents both contrasts the historical figure with the mythical figure, and shows some of the roots of the creation of "the cult to Bolívar." Each essay in Bushnell's collection includes an editorial introduction which seeks to contextualize the historical source.

12. Translator Robert F. McNerney, Jr. explains in the Forward to his translation of O'Leary's memoirs: "Shortly before his death Bolívar expressed the wish that General O'Leary write the story of his life"(xi). O'Leary's son, Simón Bolívar O'Leary published the thirty-two volume Memorias del General O'Leary between 1879 and 1888. David Bushnell calls O'Leary's memoirs "the most important of all the firsthand accounts left by participants in the independence struggle" (Bushnell 89).

13. In the original Spanish, the General "concluyó en caribe puro: ¡Lo demás son pingadas!" (207).

14. Bakhtin calls Don Quixote "one of the greatest and at the same time most carnivalesque novels of world literature" (Problems 128).

15. Bakhtin calls the bodily element of carnivalized literature--which includes food, drink, defecation, sexual life, and hyperbole-grotesque realism. According to Bakhtin, "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (Rabelais 19-20).

16. Edward Waters Hood explains the significance of this nightmare for the General: ". . . Es una pesadilla porque la mujer físicamente lo posee repetidamente sin que se pueda escapar" (163). Hood, quoting García Márquez, goes on to assert that following the death of his wife the only love which possessed Bolívar "fue su sueño de liberar y unir el continente americano" (164).